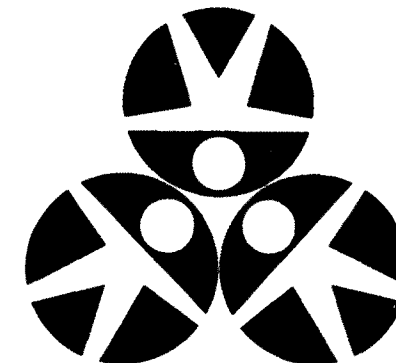


ACSPRI newsletter

Australian Consortium
for Social and
Political Research
Incorporated



ACSPRI Newsletter

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Contributions from readers are encouraged and reports on the use of data supplied through ACSPRI would be of particular interest. Contributions and enquiries about ACSPRI should be addressed to:

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EXTRACTS FROM THE ANNUAL REPORT

The foundation Chairman of ACSPRI, Greg Armstrong, did not stand for re-election this year due to the pressure of other commitments. Dr Terry Beed (Sydney), former Vice-Chairman, was elected Chairperson and Ms Else Holmstrom (Melbourne) was elected Vice-Chairperson.

ICPSR increased its travel subsidy to ACSPRI nominees attending the ICPSR Summer Training Program to a total of US\$2000 this year. However, only one nominee attended, although a second was forced to withdraw because of ill health.

Seven member institutions requested a total of 55 data sets during the year. Only 10 of these were obtained from ICPSR, with 7 obtained from the SSRC Survey Archive, 1 from the Zentralarchiv, Cologne and 3 from the Data Program and Library Service, Wisconsin. The remaining requests were serviced from ACSPRI holdings.

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CHANGES IN ACSPRI REPRESENTATIVES

The following changes have been made in ACSPRI Representatives since the publication of the list of member institutions and representatives in the first issue of the Newsletter (March 1980).

Ms E. Holmstrom, Department of Political Science, University of Melbourne replaces Mr K.G. Armstrong of the same department. Ms Holmstrom is the current Vice-Chairperson of ACSPRI.

Mr David Brereton, Department of Politics, Monash University replaces Professor D. Kemp.

From 1 January 1982, Dr Paul Langley, Economics, La Trobe University will replace Mr D.H. Borchardt, Chief Librarian.

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA ARCHIVES

In the last issue of the Newsletter, I reported the decision by the ANU to establish a data archive as part of the Research School of Social Sciences. The archive has now been established and named the Social Science Data Archives (SSDA). At present, staff of the Archives include the Acting Head, a computer programmer, a research assistant and a secretary. The appointment of a permanent Head is imminent, and there is funding allocated to support an additional research assistant and a data processing operator. An Advisory Committee will be established to oversee the activities of the Archives.

The task of the SSDA is to select (with the help of its Advisory Committee) priority subject areas for information and data collection; identify sources of data relevant to the selected areas; negotiate the acquisition of these data; clean, catalogue and produce codebooks for the collected data; and make it available to social science research workers.

Staff of the SSDA will assist researchers in locating data relevant to their needs and negotiate the acquisition of these data from other data archives, government agencies, market researchers, academic departments and other research bodies. All data obtained will become part of the Archives' holdings and be made available to social scientists subject to whatever restrictions are placed on access by the depositor.

A minimum level of data checking will be carried out on receipt of a data file by the SSDA. More detailed checking, error correction, and creation of a codebook will be undertaken only on studies thought to warrant the effort and expense on advice from its Advisory Committee.

The SSDA will continue the former role of the ANU Survey Research Centre as agent and administrative headquarters for ACSPRI. One copy of the documentation for each data set deposited with the SSDA will be distributed to each member institution in addition to a

catalogue of available data. New acquisitions will be advertised in the ACSPRI Newsletter.

Researchers wishing to deposit data with the SSDA or who would like assistance in locating and acquiring data for secondary analysis should contact their local ACSPRI representative or write directly to the SSDA at:

Social Science Data Archives
Research School of Social Sciences
ANU, PO Box 4,
CANBERRA, ACT. 2600
Telephone (062) 494400.

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AN ARCHIVE OF SURVEY DATA ON DRUG USE IN AUSTRALIA

The Social Science Data Archives (SSDA) has received a grant from the National Drug Education Programme administered by the Commonwealth Department of Health for the conduct of a 12-month project designed to establish an archive of survey data on drug use in Australia. The objectives of the project are:

1. To bring together into a central archive copies of machine-readable data sets and documentation arising from surveys of drug use in Australia;
2. to prepare, where necessary, adequate documentation for these data sets;
3. to disseminate information about these data sets and to distribute copies of the data sets and documentation to researchers wishing to conduct secondary analyses.

During the first phase of the project, the SSDA will be contacting principal investigators or organisations involved in collecting data on drug use for details of the present status of the data files and their availability for use by other researchers. Where the researcher is willing to release the data, they will be asked to provide copies of related documentation such as questionnaires, a codebook, details of

the fieldwork and associated publications. These materials will be used to compile a detailed summary of the work. Printed copies of these summaries will be made available to libraries and interested organisations and individuals.

In the second phase of the project data sets deposited by researchers with the SSDA will undergo a preliminary error check to ensure compatibility with the documentation and any discrepancies or queries will be notified to the depositor for clarification. A complete description of the data set will be prepared for distribution with the data file. The right of the depositor to impose restrictions on the use of the data is recognised and will be honoured, although it is hoped that such restrictions will be limited to those necessary to protect the confidentiality of respondents and the depositors right to first use of the data.

As data sets become available, information about them will be disseminated to potential users through this Newsletter and other publications. Copies of the data and documentation will be supplied to secondary users at the cost of copying these materials.

As new surveys are carried out in the future, researchers will be contacted and asked to deposit their data with the SSDA for release, at the appropriate time, to other researchers. It is hoped that the comprehensive collection of data established during this project will act as an incentive to researchers to make full use of available data and, where new data collections are necessary, to prepare the data for later access by others.

Anyone holding data on drug use which they are willing to add to the archive and anyone wishing to be sent details of the progress of the project should contact the Social Science Data Archives - telephone 062 494400.

* * *

1981 CENSUS TABLES

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) plans to produce a large number of cross-classified tables from the 1981 Census. The 'Catalogue of 1981 Census Tables' is now available and provides a description of the planned outputs. These tables will be available on computer printout pages or microfiche, where each fiche contains up to 269 frames and each frame is equivalent to one page.

More complex tables providing cross-classifications of a large number of characteristics are, because of their size, made available on magnetic tape only as Multi-Dimensional Matrix Summary Files (Matrices). The matrix size will be limited to a maximum of 25 'characters', where the number of 'characters' for each classification is the number of digits required to hold the number of codes for that classification. Thus for example, a matrix could include a cross-tabulation of 10 single digit classifications (coded 1-9), 6 two-digit classifications (coded 1-99), and a three-digit classification (coded 1-999).

Orders for 1981 Census matrices are currently being accepted by the ABS, and production will be on a first come first served basis with government departments having first opportunity to specify their requirements. Orders from other users are now being taken although the full cost of producing the matrix must be borne by the requester. On the basis of 1976 Census costs, this would be of the order of \$2000-\$3000. Matrix Order Forms (MOF 1 and MOF 2) and further information are available from the Population Census Branch of the ABS - 'phone 062 525851.

Production of matrices is expected to commence in 1983. Once the initial user has been supplied, copies of the matrices will be made generally available to other users, probably at a cost of \$50 per magnetic tape. Unlike matrices from previous Censuses, where tapes were written in a format which usually had first to be translated using machine assembly language, 1981 Census

matrices will be available in 'character' format (ASCII or EBCDIC). Thus the data will be generally accessible using standard packages such as SPSS and programs written in high level languages such as FORTRAN.

The cross-classifications available on the Matrix Tapes are the most detailed description of the characteristics of the community available from the Census and thus offer considerable opportunity for secondary analysis. Further details of the content and availability of the 1981 Census matrices will be presented as they become available.

* * *

HOW MUCH INTEREST IS THERE IN OLD OPINION POLL DATA?

The Roper Center holds copies of the questionnaires and data from about 80 surveys conducted for Australian Public Opinion Polls by the Morgan Research Centre between 1943 and 1967. These surveys provide the only regular measures of public opinion in Australia on an interstate basis over this period, covering a wide range of the issues and events of the time. Complete details of the content of the data sets are currently being sought.

Through an exchange agreement between the Roper Center and ACSPRI, copies of these data sets could be acquired. However, in order to make these polls conveniently accessible for further analysis a good deal of work would be required. The data is at present held in column-binary format on tape, which means it is partly multi-punched, and the documentation obtained so far consists of rather faint copies of questionnaires with column numbers added. A minimum requirement would therefore be the 'spreading' of the multi-punched columns and production of clear documentation.

The Social Science Data Archives is considering making an application for funds to carry out this work, but before doing so would like to hear from potential users of the data. A brief note stating in broad terms the purposes for

which this data might be used would be very helpful. A joint application from intended users and the SSDA would have a much greater chance of success.

* * *

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE OF COMPUTERISED DATA ON AGEING (NACDA) AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE ARCHIVE AND INFORMATION NETWORK (CJAIN).

Four years ago, ICPSR also became the home of both NACDA and CJAIN. Chief among the archived materials of these two specialised collections are the Longitudinal Retirement History Surveys and the National Crime (Victimization) Surveys.

NACDA has three major program elements: (1) resource development to improve the quality and breadth of archival holdings relevant to the field of ageing and to process and document the data collections to increase their utility for potential users; (2) dissemination and utilisation of data in the archive; (3) training to improve the methodological and technical skills of academic researchers and ageing network personnel. NACDA is a joint project of ICPSR and the Institute of Gerontology at the University of Michigan and all data held in the archive are available from ICPSR. NACDA training activities include a four week workshop on 'Empirical Research Issues in Ageing' offered in the ICPSR Summer Training Program and 'Creative Data Use and Presentation' and 'Issues and Methods in Ageing Research' offered in the Institute of Gerontology's Summer Education Program. Stipend support to offset travel and living expenses is available for participants in all three workshops.

The goal of CJAIN is to facilitate and enhance research, planning, and policy development in the field of criminal justice through use of quantitative data resources. Again all data holdings are available through ICPSR. A four week workshop, the Seminar on Quantitative Analysis of Crime and the Criminal Justice System, is included in the ICPSR Summer Training Program and stipend support is available. A directory of

publicly available computer-readable data sets including those held by ICPSR and from many other sources as well is now available. The directory will be continually updated to include information about new data sets as they are generated or are located, and will be published periodically and distributed to interested researchers.

Bulletins of both these archives are distributed to all ACSPRI representatives. Individuals, agencies or institutions wishing to receive copies directly should write to NACDA and/or CJAIN, The University of Michigan, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Requests for data should however be submitted through ACSPRI representatives in the usual way.

* * *

DATA PREPARATION MANUAL

The ICPSR Director of Management and Administration, Carolyn Geda has recently completed a Data Preparation Manual. Incorporated in the Manual are sections on documenting a study substantively and technically, a tape specification form indicating information which should be recorded when data is stored on magnetic tape, and standard data formats which will ensure maximum compatibility with hardware and software systems generally. Common coding conventions and guidelines for checking and cleaning data are also presented. A checklist is included to guide the user systematically through the documentation and storage procedure.

The Manual should be compulsory reading for all researchers involved in collecting data and preparing it for their own use and use by others. The series of steps described represent work which should always be carried out in one form or another in the process of collecting data and preparing it for use. By following the steps systematically, assurance is provided that all the essential information is recorded and is not lost because of the departure of key personnel or the frailties of human memory.

Copies of the Manual can be obtained from the SSDA or by writing to Carolyn Geda at ICPSR, University of Michigan, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA.

* * *

INFORMATION SOURCES ON AUSTRALIAN DATA COLLECTIONS

The Catalogue of Statistical Data Collections undertaken by Commonwealth Government Departments and Authorities 1979-80 contains information on statistical data collections undertaken wholly or in part during the twelve months to 30 June 1980, either by the department themselves or by outside consultants or private organisations acting on their behalf. This updates the previous catalogue covering collections taken in 1978. Requests for copies of the catalogue should be directed to Ms Jenni Eason, Secretariat, ABS, P.O. Box 10, Belconnen, ACT 2616 (telephone: (062) 525068).

The first draft edition of the Register of Data Collection Activities of Victorian Government Agencies has also been produced. The Register is compiled by the Statistics Co-ordinating Group of the State Co-ordination Council and is intended to provide a comprehensive and readily updated reference to the main classes of data currently collected by Victorian Government Agencies. Work is currently underway on up-dating and revising the format of this register, and a second edition is expected to be available shortly.

The third edition of the Social Welfare Research Bulletin, produced and published by the Commonwealth Department of Social Security, provides basic details of 1,500 research projects recorded in the Department's Research Information System. Projects are classified and indexed into subject areas of relevance, and basic entries include the names of researchers involved, funding agency, contact and total cost of the project. More detailed information on projects included in the register for the first time in this edition is given in summaries of research. Summaries of

projects not included in this edition have appeared in the first or second edition or are available from the Editor as a printout summary. It is indeed unfortunate that this edition of the Bulletin is to be the last issue of what is a very comprehensive and unique reference to research projects in the social welfare field.

* * *

REPORT ON THE 1981 IFDO/IASSIST CONFERENCE

As reported in the last Newsletter, the 1981 IFDO/IASSIST Conference on 'The Impact of Computerisation on Social Research: Data Bases and Technological Development' was held in Grenoble during September. 236 participants representing twenty countries attended the Conference. Jane Magford (SSDA, ANU) reports briefly on some of the topics covered below.

The first day of the Conference was set aside for workshops. Two full-day and three half-day sessions were organised, unfortunately on an overlapping schedule which meant it was possible to attend only two at most.

The workshop on 'Building information systems to direct users to social science data files' examined the efforts to introduce bibliographic control of machine-readable data files (MRDF) and procedures for describing and classifying MRDF. Discussion fairly quickly focused on the problems of cataloguing MRDF. The concerted efforts made by data archives over recent years towards standardised control of data files in line with traditional library procedures for print materials is clearly proving a painful experience for many. Producers of MRDF being inconsistent in their use of a title; a given title not constructed according to accepted conventions; a title commonly used differing from that in the documentation; are common occurrences with MRDF, making the definition of this most basic identifier difficult. Similar difficulties occur in defining the edition, responsibility and producer statements for MRDF. At least there is

now agreement among archives on the information required to catalogue a data file. The problem now is how to put these requirements into practice.

Participants in the workshop on 'The formation of a professional data archivist and librarian' agreed that in small archives the generalist archivist with experience in computing, librarianship and social science, particularly social science methodology and standard statistical packages such as SPSS, was needed. In addition, the personality to cope with the public relations work associated with data acquisition and dissemination was essential. Larger archives could enforce a greater division of tasks allowing specialised staffing. Formal training opportunities are however very limited so that training was largely received 'on-the-job'.

The President of IASSIST, Alice Robbin, opened the plenary session on the Conference proper. Concerned mainly with "the creation of statistical data and administrative records" by governments, she felt that both social scientists and government administrators would gain from greater co-operation. Efforts should be directed "to improving the quality of data and the integrity of statistical and other information", and "... to greater co-ordination of the information system and to better planning to meet anticipated and unanticipated changes."

Herve le Bras (Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques) presented a gloomy picture of the consequences for the human sciences of the earlier development of computers, seeing them as a giant toy, used as a justification for all kinds of research activities with slim theoretical worth. Incomprehensible jargon and the production of enormous amounts of output obscured the role of the computer. The computer, he said, became reified. Since 1970, however, the development of smaller computers linked to common resources and with the flexibility of interactive languages, has brought the computer back into more realistic focus. It no longer dominates the scientific

problem but is used for what it is - as a tool whose essential role is to prepare, structure, present data and results, and render them accessible. It is a technique, not a science in itself.

Richard Rockwell (SSRC, USA) directed his talk towards the status of social science technologies (SST's) in advanced scientific-industrial nations. Social scientists, he said, have conducted important research on the technologies produced by the physical sciences (eg. the social effects of aviation, nuclear accidents, highways, water irrigation systems) and have also conducted research on technologies produced by the social sciences (eg. standardised personnel testing procedures, economic forecasting, political polling, consumer research, life tables). Yet it seems there is a "virtual exclusion of SST from official statistics and research on technological innovation". Even social scientists themselves seem to "discriminate against applications of (their) own knowledge, preferring the exotic work of other disciplines". SST's are not generally recognised "as part of the system of science that produces technologies at work in the economy", and yet have such a vital role to play in the economic market place.

The remainder of the Conference was centred around five themes: new types of research; new institutions; new tools; relations between data producers and researchers; and social science teaching. In addition, special sessions were conducted on automatic cartography; the IFDO Joint European Time Series Data File; and access to government data for research purposes.

Overall, the Conference was thoroughly stimulating. Two related themes seemed to dominate. One was methods and techniques for improving access to information about data; and the second was about improving access to the data itself. With the rapid technological advances in computing it has become possible to store more information, to manipulate information more easily, and to retrieve information more readily. Combined with this development is a desire amongst data archivists to

improve access, mainly because data resources are underutilised.

There has always been a concern about underutilisation and it was felt that this was largely because information about available data was not easily accessible. Thus, the last few years have seen the development of sophisticated information systems by data archives. Descriptions of archived data include bibliographical information and extensive summaries of methodology and content, often including a complete listing of variables. Retrieval of this information, through keyword and other search strategies, can also be at the file or variable level, the latter particularly assisting the user wishing to locate variables for comparative analysis.

Linked to the information retrieval capability is the development in data retrieval. For those wishing to analyse a small number of variables in any one data set, some archives now offer on-line integrated retrieval and analysis capabilities interfaced with statistical packages to permit rapid retrieval of output in the form of the required tables.

Organisationally, the French hosts at the Centre d'Etude et de Recherche sur l'Administration Economique et l'Amenagement du Territoire (C.E.R.A.T.) of the Universite des Sciences Sociales de Grenoble are to be congratulated. The program was efficiently run, its staff welcoming, and the difficulties inherent in a dual language (French/English) conference largely overcome. To top it all, there was the splendid setting of Grenoble within the French Alps. The IASSIST committee seems to have a flair for location. Next year the Conference is to be held in a beachfront hotel at San Diego, California!

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